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ACTION ALERT

DATE: January 18, 2018
TO: Concerned Parties
FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director, NAACP Washington Bureau

**COMMENTS ARE
DUE BY
JAN. 24, 2018**

THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (FCC) PASSES A PROPOSAL WHICH JEOPARDIZES OVER 12 MILLION LOW-INCOME AMERICANS' ACCESS TO TELEPHONE SERVICES

*THE LIFELINE TELECOM SERVICE, WHICH WAS SCHEDULED TO BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE
BROADBAND INTERNET SERVICE OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS IS NOW THREATENED*

THE ISSUE:

On November 16, 2017, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted to support proposals promoted by Chairman Ajit Pai which will dramatically curtail the NAACP-supported *Lifeline* program. The *Lifeline* program was initiated in 1985 by President Ronald Reagan to help bring tele-communication capabilities to all Americans and to provide subsidized basic phone service for low-income consumers. *Lifeline* is a program that has worked: the percentage of low-income households with phone service has increased from 80% in 1985, when *Lifeline* began, to nearly 92% in 2011. In 2005 the *Lifeline* program was expanded by President George W. Bush to include wireless service. Beginning in December, 2017, the *Lifeline* Program was scheduled to transition from telephone-only to include broadband internet services within a five-year period. Currently, nearly 13 million low-income Americans use *Lifeline*, only about one-third of those who are eligible for the program.

Included in the *Lifeline*-decimating proposals that were approved of by the FCC vote are initiatives which would: limit carrier participation (a move which would adversely affect approximately 75% of current *Lifeline* participants, or 8.5 million Americans); restrict voice service support to only low-income households in rural areas; install a lifetime cap on *Lifeline* recipients; and place an overall budget cap on the *Lifeline* program. Especially hard hit by the new *Lifeline* rules are Native Americans. Tribes will see their subsidies immediately cut and their lands redefined so they may not qualify for the program. These changes were made without consulting the tribal governments. In a landscape where the distance to the nearest services are miles away, telephone is a lifeline, and this move will devastate many of our first American families. Many of the new *Lifeline* rules will now be open to public comment before being made permanent. The exception are the proposals aimed at Native Americans; those changes are immediate.

Lifeline has provided families with a pathway out of poverty and has been a critical component of making tele-communications affordable for more Americans. According to survey data, the typical *Lifeline* subscriber makes just \$14,000 per year. It is because of *Lifeline* that more American seniors can call their loved ones, neighbors, or emergency services in the event of a mishap. *Lifeline* allows subscribers to speak with their child's educators. It is because of *Lifeline* that workers can stay on top of their fulltime, or multiple part-time, shift schedules. *Lifeline* has enabled Veterans to access the health, educational, and financial benefits to which they are entitled. For low-income families, a telephone is a key connection to education and economic opportunities, and safety during times of emergencies. The expansion to broadband would have helped these low-income Americans not only stay in touch, it would have helped close the digital divide.

The "comment" period, by which the FCC accepts input on these proposed changes before making them permanent, is open now through January 24, 2018. The NAACP has supported *Lifeline* in numerous resolutions throughout the years. We need to let the FCC know that we oppose these proposals and that we support a robust continuation and expansion of the *Lifeline* program.

More...

THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:

Contact the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) **and URGE THEM TO REJECT THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LIFELINE PROGRAM.** To submit your comments, you should:

✓ **To submit the comments via hard copy:**

Address and mail your comments to
Members,
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

**A SAMPLE
LETTER IS
ATTACHED**

✓ **To submit your comments electronically, go to:**

www.fcc.gov/ecfs/filings

(this will take you to the submit a filing" page)

In the proceedings category, you should type the numbers

17-287 11-42 09-197 (press return after each set of numbers)

In the next category, under "Name of filers", you should type your own name

You can skip the next two categories, since no law firm is involved

In the next category, put your e-mail address as the "primary contact e-mail"

Under the "type of filing", select "comment" from the pull down menu

Skip the next three categories, which ask for file number, report number, and Bureau ID number

In the next category, select "Filer" from the pull down menu

In the next 5 lines, fill in your address

Next, click the blue link to upload the Lifeline comments

You are then given the option to review and confirm your filings

BE SURE TO CLICK "SUBMIT" WHEN YOU ARE SATISFIED WITH THE FORM

THE MESSAGE

- *Lifeline* is a program that has worked: the percentage of low-income households with phone service has increased from 80% in 1985, when *Lifeline* began, to nearly 92% in 2011;
- The typical *Lifeline* subscriber makes just \$14,000 per year; currently, nearly 13 million low-income Americans use *Lifeline*, and this represents only one-third of eligible Americans;
- It is because of *Lifeline* that more American seniors can call their loved ones, neighbors, or emergency services in the event of a mishap. *Lifeline* allows subscribers to speak with their child's educators. It is because of *Lifeline* that workers can stay on top of their fulltime, or multiple part-time, shift schedules. *Lifeline* has enabled Veterans to access the health, educational, and financial benefits to which they are entitled. For low-income families, a telephone is a key connection to education and economic opportunities, and safety during times of emergencies. The expansion to broadband would have helped these low-income Americans not only stay in touch, it would have helped close the digital divide;
- *Lifeline* was begun in 1985 by President Reagan; it was expanded in 2005 by President George W. Bush to include wireless service. Beginning in December, 2017, the *Lifeline* Program was scheduled to transition from telephone-only to include broadband internet services within a five-year period.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!

If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

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Sample Letter

(date)

Members,
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: MY STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE LIFELINE PROGRAM, WC DOCKET NUMBERS 17-287, 11-42, 09-197

Dear Commissioner,

The ability to effectively communicate with the world outside of your home is of the utmost importance. It is for this reason that I support a robust *Lifeline* program and I urge you to reject the proposals to decimate the program which are currently before you.

The *Lifeline* program was initiated in 1985 by President Ronald Reagan to help bring tele-communication capabilities to all Americans and to provide subsidized basic phone service for low-income consumers. *Lifeline* is a program that has worked: the percentage of low-income households with phone service has increased from 80% in 1985, when *Lifeline* began, to nearly 92% in 2011. In 2005 the *Lifeline* program was expanded by President George W. Bush to include wireless service. Beginning in December, 2017, the *Lifeline* program was scheduled to transition from telephone-only to include broadband internet services within a five-year period. The expansion to broadband would have helped these low-income Americans not only stay in touch, it would have helped close the digital divide.

The typical *Lifeline* subscriber makes just \$14,000 per year; currently, nearly 13 million low-income Americans use *Lifeline*. It is because of *Lifeline* that more American seniors can call their loved ones, neighbors, or emergency services in the event of a mishap. *Lifeline* allows subscribers to speak with their child's educators. It is because of *Lifeline* that workers can stay on top of their fulltime, or multiple part-time, shift schedules. *Lifeline* has enabled Veterans to access the health, educational, and financial benefits to which they are entitled. For low-income families, a telephone is a key connection to education and economic opportunities, and safety during times of emergencies.

Current proposals would harm the Lifeline program by:

- eliminating service for approximately 75 percent of current participants, particularly mobile services;
- restricting voice service support to only low-income households in rural areas;
- install a lifetime cap on *Lifeline* recipients;
- place an overall budget cap on the *Lifeline* program; and

Please act to protect Lifeline and reject these draconian proposals. I urge you to further promote Lifeline so that all Americans may have access to communication. Thank you for hearing my views.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and
remember to include your address)